Dr. *Wigglesworth's*

TWO

LECTURES

ON

Romans IX. 18.


BRITISH MUSEUM

THE

Sovereignty of GOD

IN THE

Exerciſes of his Mercy;

And how HE is ſaid to

Harden the Hearts of Men.

Conſider'd in

Two Publick Lectures at *Harvard College* in *Cambridge.*

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Made publick at the general Deſire of thoſe that heard them.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

THE

Sovereignty of GOD

IN THE

Exerciſes of his MERCY.

ROM. IX. 18.

Therefore hath he Mercy on whom he will have Mercy; and whom he will he hardneth.

IN the preceeding Context the Apoſtle rehearſes ſeveral Declarations of GOD to *Rebecca*, to *Moſes*, and to *Pharaoh*, recorded in the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament; from which, laid together, he draws up this Concluſion in the Words before us, *Therefore hath he Mercy on whom he will have Mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth.* As if he had ſaid, from the divine Declarations above mentioned it appears, *That GOD acts with ſovereign Liberty and Freedom in the Exerciſes both of his Mercy, and of his ſeverer Perfections.*

It

It is only *the ſovereign Freedom of GOD in the Exerciſes of his Mercy*, which I propoſe to treat of; becauſe a due Conſideration of this alone will be ſufficient to prevent ſome Miſtakes of a pernicious Tendency, which ſeem beginning to be revived at the preſent Day. *

In the Proſecution of my intended Subject, I ſhall ſpeak of two Things, the one ſuppoſed, and the other aſſerted in my Text. The Thing ſuppoſed is, *That GOD is merciful*, And the Thing aſſerted is, *That he acts with ſovereign Liberty in the Exerciſes of his Mercy.*

I. *My Text ſuppoſes that GOD is merciful.* For if he exerciſes Mercy, he muſt be merciful. Whatever *Men* may ſometimes do, GOD can never deny himſelf, by acting a Part diſagreeable to his Nature. Here then we may conſider two Things, viz.

1. *What we are to underſtand by the Mercy of GOD.* And,

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* *I was led into a Diſcourſe on this Subject, by perceiving from a Pamphlet or two which fell into my Hands, that ſome of the Gentlemen in* England, *who have of late gone ſo warmly into the Doctrine of* Univerſal Redemption, *have done it upon ſuch Apprehenſions of the* Mercy of GOD, *as have almoſt perſuaded them (as ſome of themſelves acknowledge) that Mankind will be* univerſally ſaved *too. Upon which I concluded, that ſuch dangerous Deductions from the Conſideration of the divine Mercy muſt proceed from want of a due Attention to the* Sovereignty of GOD in exerciſing his Mercy.

2. *How*

2. *How it appears that he is merciful.* To the firſt of theſe I would ſay,

That the Mercy of GOD is his Goodneſs to them that are in Miſery, or are expoſed to it. When we ſpeak of the Mercy of Men, we intend by it a compaſſionate painful Senſe of the Miſeries we ſee others groaning under, or apprehend them in Danger of falling into; which excites us to endeavour to prevent thoſe Miſeries, we apprehend them in Danger of; and to deliver them from, or to relieve and comfort them under thoſe Miſeries, which they are actually fallen into. This is what we underſtand by Mercy, when aſcrib'd to Men; and this is what the Scriptures teach us to underſtand by the *Divine Mercy*, where they ſo often explain it by *Pity* and *Compaſſion*; which is an Affection that creates in us an uneaſy Sympathy with them whom we behold in Miſery, and a painful Concern for them whom we imagine expoſed to it. Hence it is ſaid in Scripture, that *GOD pities them that fear him, like as a Father pities his Children*; that *he is afflicted himſelf in all the Afflictions of his People*; that *his Bowels are troubled* at their Miſeries, *his Heart turned within him, and his Repentings kindled together.* *

But tho' the Scriptures, in Condeſcention to our Weakneſs, that they may give us a more lively affecting Senſe of theGreatneſs of the Mercy of GOD, do thus repreſent it as attended with all that inward Commotion and uneaſy Senſation, which we experience in ourſelves upon the Appearance of an Object of Pity; yet we muſt be far from attributing the Imperfections of human Paſſions to the Divine

* Pſal. 103. 13. Iſai. 63. 9, 15. Hoſ. 11. 8.

Nature.

Nature. Any inward Diſturbance or Uneaſineſs at the Miſery of the Creatures, would be inconſiſtent with the abſolute Perfection of GOD, and an Interruption of his perfect Happineſs. All therefore that we are to underſtand by ſuch Repreſentations of the Mercy of GOD, is only, that the Goodneſs of GOD diſpoſes him to deal after the ſame, or rather a much kinder Manner with miſerable Creatures, than our Affections of Pity and Compaſſion incline us to deal with others in, or expoſed to the like miſerable Circumſtances. We muſt carefully ſeperate in our Thoughts from the Mercy of GOD, every Thing that implies any Weakneſs or Imperfection; and attribute nothing to it but what is conſiſtent with the higheſt Perfection, and makes an eminent Part of it. But ſo much for *the Nature of the Mercy of GOD.* The next Thing is,

2. *To ſhew how it appears that GOD is merciful.* And here I may ſay

1. *That the Mercy of GOD is evident from the daily viſible Effects of it.* For the Light of Nature is enough to teach us, that we, and all Men are Sinners; that in many Things we offend daily; that the Evil of Sin is ſo exceeding great, that tho' GOD may ſometimes correct and chaſten us, yet we none of us ſuffer what our Iniquities deſerve. Nay, inſtead of this, perhaps God is daily loading us with his Benefits, while we are daily rebelling againſt him. Now we are bound in Honour to almoſt all the Divine Perfections, to ſuppoſe one great End of this Way of dealing with us, to be a very merciful one; viz to overcome us with Kindneſs, and lead us to Repentance, and ſo prevent our falling into everlaſting Miſery.

And

And beſides this merciful Deſign of the divine Benefits beſtow'd on Sinners, if we farther conſider a State of Sin to be a miſerable State, as indeed it is, there will appear a great deal of Mercy in adding leſs to the Miſery of this State than Sin deſerves; and much more ſtill in often endeavouring to recover Men out of it, by Benefits rather than Afflictions.

In ſhort, it is evident to the Light of Nature, that every Degree of Puniſhment deſerved and not inflicted, is an Inſtance of divine Mercy. And this ſinful World abounds ſo much with Inſtances of this Sort, that we all have Reaſon enough to acknowlege with the inſpired Writers, that *the Earth is full of the Mercy of the* LORD; and that *it is of his Mercies that we are not conſumed.* Which leads me to obſerve,

2. *How ſtrongly the Scriptures aſſert, that this Perfection belongeth unto* GOD. For they not only ſimply tell us, that *unto the* LORD *belongeth Mercy*, Pſal. 62. 12. That *he is ready to pardon, gracious and merciful*, Neh. 9. 17. That *all the Paths of the* LORD *are Mercy*, Pſal. 25. 10. and the like: But they alſo aſſure us, that *he delighteth in Mercy, and rejoices over his People to do them Good*; that *he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men*, Lam. 3. 33. but that *he will wait that he may be gracious*, Iſai. 30. 18. and that *Puniſhment is his ſtrange Work*, Iſai. 23. 21. They call him *the Father of Mercies, and the* GOD *of all Comfort to them that are in Tribulation.* They ſpeak of *the* MULTITUDE *of his* TENDER *Mercies.* And they aſſure us, that *he is plenteous, rich and abundant in Mercy*: that *his Mercy is great unto the Heavens*; yea *above the Heavens*: that *the Earth is full of his Mercy*, and *his tender Mercies are over all his Works*: that *he layeth*

up Mercy in Store for thouſands of Generations : that *his Mercy endureth forever* : and that *though a Woman may forget her ſucking Child, that ſhe ſhould not have Compaſſion on the Son of her Womb* ; *yet the LORD will not forget his People.*

In a Word, the Scriptures ſeem to have *magnified the Mercy of GOD* above almoſt any other Attribute ; inſomuch as to tell us, that *it rejoiceth againſt* ſome of the ſeverer Perfections of the Divine Nature. And this, the People of GOD in all Ages have been ſo ſenſible of, from the viſible Effects of it to them who have deſerved it leaſt, that they have too often been ready to *envy the Fooliſh, when they have ſeen the Proſperity of the Wicked* ; and to complain and expoſtulate even with GOD himſelf, as if he exalted his Mercy to the Diſparagement of ſome of his other Perfections, *When he looked on them that dealt treacherouſly, and kept Silence, and ſuffered the Wicked to live, became old, yea wax mighty in Riches and Power, and ſend forth their little Ones as a Flock, and ſpend their Days in Mirth*, and at laſt *go down to the Grave without Bands in their Death* ; notwithſtanding their moſt outragious Abuſe of all this Mercy, by taking Encouragement from it, to *ſet their Mouth againſt the Heavens, and ſay unto GOD, depart from us* ; *for we deſire not the Knowlege of thy Ways. What is the Almighty that we ſhould ſerve him ? Or what Profit ſhould we have, if we pray unto him ?* But theſe Things may ſuffice for a general View of the ſtrong and lively Repreſentations made of the Mercy of GOD in the holy Scriptures. Notwithſtanding all which I muſt ſay,

II. *That GOD acts with ſovereign Liberty and Freedom in the Exerciſes of his Mercy.---HE will have*

Mercy

Mercy on whom he will have Mercy. Whereas the Caſe is not ſo with the Creatures; for GOD hath tied us up to Rules, and not left us to our own Diſcretion in this Matter. He hath commanded us to love Mercy, and to exerciſe it according to our Ability, upon every Appearance of a proper Object of it; without preferring *one* to the neglect of *another* equally miſerable, thro' private Favour and Affection. He don't allow us, (at leaſt in our private Capacities) to revenge the greateſt perſonal Affronts and Injuries, or to be ever the more backward to comfort, and relieve, and deliver the Miſerable, becauſe they have been injurious and abuſive to us; but commands us to *put on (as the Elect of GOD) Bowels of Mercies, Kindneſs, Humbleneſs of Mind, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any Man have a Quarrel againſt any, not only to ſeven Times, but even to ſeventy Times ſeven.* In a Word, we muſt *love our Enemies, bleſs them that curſe us, do Good to them that hate us, and pray* (which is the only Expreſſion of our merciful Diſpoſition that in ſuch Circumſtances ordinarily lies within our Power) *for them that deſpitefully uſe us, and perſecute us*, Matth. 5. 44.

Thus we, whoſe Wiſdom reaches but a little way, whoſe Diſpoſition to Acts of Kindneſs and Mercy is many Times too feeble, and whoſe angry Paſſions are not ſeldom as much too ſtrong, are not left to our own Diſcretion to ſhew Mercy, or to refuſe it, when, and where we pleaſe; nor is it fit we ſhould. And therefore GOD, who knows our Frame, and ſees the many Miſchiefs both of a private and publick Nature, which would ariſe from leaving us to our own Liberty in this Matter, hath in great Wiſdom and Goodneſs required of us an univerſal Benevolence, and Readineſs to ſhew Mercy to all that are in Miſery, accord-

ing to our own Ability, and their Neceſſities; unleſs where we are ſure (which we can very ſeldom, if ever be) that they are quite cut off from the divine Mercy, and devoted forever to the Wrath and Curſe of GOD.

But as for GOD himſelf, whoſe Underſtanding is infinite, who is exalted far above the Imperfection and Weakneſs of human Paſſions, who hath the Government of the World upon him, & is therefore concerned to ſee the great Ends of Government anſwered, to ſecure his own Honour, and promote the general Good of the Subject, in the wiſeſt and moſt effectual Methods; he is not, nor can he be, otherwiſe than abſolutely free and unconfin'd in his Acts of Grace and Mercy. Mercy and Juſtice are both alike dear and eſſential to him. All the World is become guilty before him, and ſo obnoxious to his Juſtice. And if they were not ſo, they could not be proper Objects of his Mercy; for we cannot ſuppoſe an innocent Creature to be a miſerable one. So that there can be no Room for the Exerciſe of divine Mercy, where there is not Room at the ſame Time for the Exerciſe of vindictive Juſtice. Since therefore Juſtice and Mercy are conſiſtent with each other, GOD muſt be at Liberty to exerciſe either the one or the other of them, as he thinks fit, towards thoſe who are Subjects equally capable of them both. And accordingly we ſee that in his Dealings with ſinful and miſerable Men, he diſplays them both by Turns with abſolute Sovereignty and Wiſdom, as it ſeemeth Good in his Sight. And ſometimes in the infinite Riches of his Wiſdom and Knowledge, he cauſes them (as in the ſurprizing Work of our Redemption by JESUS CHRIST) to *meet together* and *kiſs each other*, in the moſt glorious and aſtoniſhing Manner. For what ſo glorious and aſtoniſhing

aſtoniſhing Diſplay of inflexible Juſtice, and the moſt tender Mercy, can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive, as this? That the holy GOD ſhould honour his Law, and abhor Sin the Tranſgreſſion of it, ſo as not to remit the Puniſhment without a Sacrifice of infinite Value to attone for it; and yet, that he ſhould compaſſionate Mankind, who had been guilty of this hateful Thing, at ſuch a Rate, as (when no other ſuch Sacrifice could be found) to provide himſelf an Offering, even his only begotten Son.

But it is Time that I proceed to ſome of thoſe Reflections which this Subject fairly leads us into.

And here,

1. *What you have heard ſhould teach ſuch of you as are GOD's Children the moſt profound Humility and Reſignation to the Will of GOD, under the Afflictions which he is pleaſed at any Time to bring upon you.* If you are indeed the Children of GOD, you may aſſure your ſelves, that when he correcteth you it is for your Good, becauſe he ſees you need it: for *he don't afflict willingly; but as a Father pities his Children, ſo the LORD pities them that fear him.* How then ſhould your Souls be humbled within you, when at any Time you are under the Rod, that your Corruptions are ſuch, as to make theſe Severities wholeſome for you? And how ſhould you kiſs the Rod, and bleſs him that appointed it; ſince the Deſign of it is to *take away your Sins, and make you more and more the Partakers of his Holineſs? Let us never then diſpiſe any chaſtning of the LORD, nor ever faint when we are rebuked of him: For whom the LORD loveth he chaſtneth, and ſcourgeth every Son whom he receiveth*, Heb. 12.5,6.

2. *What you have heard may teach you, that it cannot be inconſiſtent with the divine Mercy, for GOD to make ſuch a Creature, as may be capable of rendring it*

ſelf

ſelf obnoxious to his vindictive Juſtice. You have been ſometimes perhaps ready to doubt, whether this be reconcileable with the Mercy of GOD, or no: but, from what you have heard, it plainly appears, that ſuch a Doubt muſt be very groundleſs and unreaſonable. A Doubt big with Abſurdity and Contradiction, and ſo utterly diſtructive of itſelf. For the Notion of vindictive Juſtice is to puniſh the Guilty according to his Deſert; and the Notion of Mercy is to ſhew Kindneſs to the Miſerable, whom we muſt always ſuppoſe to have been firſt guilty, and not to ſuffer more than his Iniquities deſerve. If therefore it was inconſiſtent with the divine Mercy to make a Creature capable of becoming ſinful & miſerable, it muſt be inconſiſtent with Mercy to leave any Room for the Exerciſe, either of Juſtice, or of it ſelf. And ſo, neither Juſtice nor Mercy could belong to the Idea of the divine Nature.

3. *What you have heard may help you in ſome Meaſure to account for diverſe perplexing Diſpenſations of divine Providence.* It may ſeem very ſtrange and unaccountable, that in Times paſt, GOD ſuffered all Nations to walk in their own Ways; while he ſhewed his Word unto *Jacob*, his Statutes and his Judgments unto *Iſrael*; and dealt not ſo with any other Nation. It may ſeem no leſs ſtrange, that Now in our Days, while we and many others, are favoured with the Light of the glorious Goſpel, whereby Life and Immortality are bro't to Light unto us; that yet ſo many more, even far the bigger Part of Mankind, are ſtill left to periſh for lack of Viſion. It is a ſurprizing Conſideration, that among the many who are favoured with the Light and Call of the Goſpel; yet ſo few are choſen, and effectually converted unto GOD, and made wiſe unto Salvation.

It

It hath been a Thought ſometimes too painful for the peculiar Favourites of Heaven, that tho' they have cleanſed their Hearts, and waſhed their Hands in Innocency; yet all the Day long they have been plagued, and chaſtened every Morning.

But now all theſe Difficulties will in a great Meaſure vaniſh, if you do but conſider, that all the World is become guilty before GOD, and ſo obnoxious to his vindictive Juſtice; without which they could not have fallen into that Miſery, which renders them proper, tho' undeſerving Objects of his Mercy: that therefore he muſt be abſolutely free to exerciſe either his Juſtice, or his Mercy, when, and where, and in what Meaſure he himſelf pleaſes: inſomuch that (for ought that we can tell) he might have glorified his Juſtice in the Deſtruction of all, without Injury to his Mercy; or his Mercy in the Salvation of all without Injury to his Juſtice. And therefore, ſince he hath tho't fit to take a middle Way, and glorify not only both theſe Attributes, but his Sovereignty alſo, by diverſifying, both the Diſpenſations of Providence, and the Means and Efficacy of Grace, according to his Pleaſure, and at length by finally ſaving ſome, and leaving others to periſh in the Miſery they have bro't upon themſelves; None have Reaſon to complain of his Juſtice towards themſelves, or to look with an evil Eye on his Mercy towards others.

4. *From GOD's ſovereign Liberty and Freedom in the Exerciſes of his Mercy, we learn abundant Cauſe of Thankfulneſs to him for aſſuring us in his Word, that whoſo confeſſeth and forſaketh his Sins ſhall have Mercy.* All our *Reaſon* and *Obſervation* could not certainly prove this to us, if we had not the Word of GOD for it. Our *Obſervation* could never ſecure us with reſpect to the *preſent World*; for every Day's Experience

rience proves, that all Things often come alike to all, ſo that here, many Times there is one Event to the Righteous, and to the Wicked. And if from hence we extend our Views to that future State of Retribution, which theſe promiſcuous Diſpenſations of Providence naturally lead us into Apprehenſions of, we ſhall find, that *meer Reaſon* can give us no better Security of the Favour and Mercy of GOD in *that*, than Obſervation can in the *preſent* State. All that Reaſon can certainly promiſe is only this, that Men ſhall not be dealt with then, in the ſame promiſcuous Manner that they are now, but that they who have been the greateſt Sinners *here*, ſhall be the greateſt Sufferers *there*, by the righteous Judgment of GOD. But the beſt of Men could not aſſure themſelves by the bare Exerciſe of their own Reaſon, that they ſhould ceaſe from ſuffering when this Life is ended. For tho' it be true, that Confeſſion of Sin, Repentance, and Amendment of Life are the beſt Things that Men can do; yet it is as true, that theſe Things make no Satisfaction to Juſtice, nor will they ordinarily anſwer the Ends of Governwent. And it is certain that no Man in this Life ſuffers what his Iniquities deſerve. Now he, who hath neither ſatisfied Juſtice, nor ſuffered all the Puniſhment he deſerves, can never aſſure himſelf that his Puniſhment is at an End, unleſs GOD be pleaſed to ſignify it to him. For the Conſideration of the divine Mercy can't ſecure him, that GOD will certainly remit any Part of the Puniſhment, which he juſtly might inflict upon him. And tho' *perhaps* Mercy *may* interpoſe in his Behalf; yet ſince GOD is at Liberty (for ought that Reaſon alone can aſſure him) to exerciſe either his Juſtice or his Mercy upon him, as he pleaſes; ſuch Uncertainty muſt keep the Mind of an awaken'd Sinner in the greateſt Suſpence

and

and Perplexity, as to a Point, which it is of vaſt Concernment to him, that he ſhould be perfectly ſatisfied in. And therefore we can never be thankful enough to GOD, that he hath taken away all Grounds for ſuch Doubtfulneſs and Uncertainty, and for the Diſtreſs and Anguiſh of Heart conſequent upon it, by the Promiſe which he hath made of the Mercy of our LORD JESUS CHRIST unto eternal Life unto all them that repent of their Sins, believe in him, and obey the Goſpel. And ſince theſe, and theſe only are the Terms, upon which we can be Partakers of the everlaſting Mercy of GOD, it thence plainly follows,

5. *That the Conſideration of the Mercy of GOD can give no juſt Encouragement to any to continue in Sin.* To Make the Mercy of GOD your Encouragement to continue in the Practice of what you know to be offenſive to him, muſt certainly be an unſufferable infinite Provocation. And the Madneſs and Folly of doing ſo will appear equal to the Wickedneſs, if you conſider, that hereby you directly contradict the *Deſign* of the Divine Mercy, which is *to lead you to Repentance*; and the *Condition of obtaining it*, which is *the forſaking of your Sins*; and therefore in ſuch a Courſe can never expect to be the better for it.

Preach'd *Sept.* 1.
1741.

ROM. IX. 18.

Therefore hath he Mercy on whom he will have Mercy, AND WHOM HE WILL HE HARDNETH.

WHEN I diſcourſed on the former Part of this Verſe, with a Deſign to furniſh you with a Preſervative againſt ſome dangerous Deductions which have been lately made from the Conſideration of the Divine Mercy; I had no Tho't of proceeding farther; but having ſince underſtood it to be the Deſire of ſeveral of you, that I ſhould conſider the latter Part of the Verſe alſo, I ſhall offer you a few Tho'ts upon it at this Time. And here my Intention will be, to endeavour, by the Help of GOD, to give you a juſt Apprehenſion of the true Importance of the Words before us; in order to vindicate the Honour of GOD from unjuſt Aſperſions, and to remove the Difficulty which is apt to ariſe in the Minds of Men about that awful Diſpenſation of Providence, which is ſometimes expreſſed in Scripture by *GOD's hardening Men's Hearts.*

My Text is not the only Place in which ſuch a Form of Expreſſion is to be met with. For GOD ſays to *Moſes*, Exod. 4. 21. *I will harden Pharoah's Heart, that he ſhall not let the People go.* And in the Story it ſelf it is ſeveral Times repeated that *GOD did harden Pharoah's Heart*: And the ſame Thing is ſaid with reſpect to the *Egyptians*; and even concerning the *Jews* themſelves in our Saviour's Time, *Joh.* 12. 40. Now when Men read ſuch Paſſages as theſe in Scripture, they are too apt to think, that he, who is ſaid to *harden the Heart*, muſt be the Author or efficient Cauſe of all thoſe Sins, which ſuch an hard Heart commits. But whoſoever

whoſoever indulge themſelves in ſuch a Tho't as this, greatly diſhonour GOD in their Hearts ; and ſadly deceive and expoſe themſelves to the Suggeſtions of the wicked One. And yet many who have a pious Fear of both theſe, may nevertheleſs be much at a Loſs how to conceive of ſuch Expreſſions, without admitting ſome Things in their Thot's, which will, in a greater or leſs Degree, incur the Guilt or Danger above mentioned.

Now for the Relief and Help of ſuch as theſe, diverſe Things may be ſaid, which are any of them, perhaps, ſufficient to vindicate the Holineſs of GOD from the leaſt Imputation. And yet, they may be taken together as a more full Account, than any of them would be alone, of that awful Diſpenſation of Divine Providence, which is now under our Conſideration.

But before I proceed to ſhew *in what Senſes, & upon what Accounts GOD may be ſaid to harden the Hearts of Men*, it will be needful to premiſe two Things, namely,

1. *That it ought to be laid in the Foundation as an undoubted Truth, that ſuch Expreſſions cannot intend, that GOD ever creates or infuſes Hardneſs into the Sinner's Heart.* The Apoſtle ſufficiently cautions us againſt ſuch a dangerous Suppoſition as this, *Jam.* 1. 13, 14, 15. *Let no Man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD : for GOD cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man. But every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Luſt, and inticed. Then when Luſt hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin : and Sin when it is finiſhed, bringeth forth Death.* To this ſolemn Caution we may add that peremptory Aſſertion, 1 *Joh.* 2. 16. *All that is in the World, the Luſt of the Fleſh, and the Luſt of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, is not of the Father, but is of the World.* Again it may be obſerved,

2. *That ſeveral Paſſages of Scripture which ſpeak of GOD's hardening Men's Hearts, have no Reſpect at all*

to their Sins; but only to ſuch fooliſh Reſolutions as prov'd their Ruin. Thus *GOD* is ſaid, Deut. 2. 30, 32. *to have hardened the Spirit of Sihon King of Heſhbon, and to have made his Heart obſtinate, not to let Iſrael paſs by him; but to come out with all his People, & fight againſt them, that GOD might deliver him into their Hand*; and ſo we read, Joſh. 11. 19,20. That *there was not a City that made Peace with the Children of Iſrael, ſave the Hivites the Inhabitants of Gibeon; all other they took in Battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their Hearts, that they ſhould come againſt Iſrael in Battle, that he might deſtroy them utterly, and that they might have no Favour, but that he might deſtroy them, as the LORD commanded Moſes.* The Iniquity of the Inhabitants of *Canaan* was now full. And for that Cauſe they were devoted by GOD to utter Deſtruction. And therefore he ſo ordered Things in his Providence, that they were none of them, except the *Gibeonites*, diſpoſed to enter into Counſels of Peace, which might have made the *Iſraelites* unwilling to be theExecutioners of the Divine Vengeance upon them; but they were all ſpirited to defend their Country to the uttermoſt, by Force of Arms: which it is certainly no Sin ordinarily in a People to do; tho' it was great Folly in them, ſince GOD appeared ſo viſibly to fight againſt them *for his People Iſrael.* And now having premiſed theſe Things, I proceed to ſay more directly to the Caſe before us.

1. *That it is very familiar to the Scriptures to uſe ſuch Terms of Expreſſion as ſeem to make GOD the Author of thoſeThings which came to paſs, only under a Permiſſive and directing Providence.* So he is ſaid to have *put a lying Spirit in the Mouth of Ahab's Prophets*, 1 King. 22. 23. only becauſe he *gave a lying Spirit leave* to enter into them. And ſo our bleſſed LORD hath taught us to pray, *Our Father in Heaven,*

abandon

ven, lead us not into Temptation, Matt. 6. 13. tho' we are elſewhere aſſured, (as hath been obſerved already) that *GOD tempteth no Man*, Jam. 1. 13. Now Things which happen under a Permiſſive and directing Providence, may be in a Largeneſs of Expreſſion aſcribed to the Will, and Counſel, and Operation of GOD. For a permiſſive Will is really a Will, tho' it be not cauſal.

2. 'Some obſerve, that Men who have firſt hardened themſelves, take the moſt innocent Occaſions 'to grow harder; nay, are hardened by ſuch Uſage, 'as would either break or ſoften other Men. And 'they who treat them in ſuch a Manner, as their 'wicked Hearts abuſe to harden themſelves, may be 'ſaid to harden them; as in common Speech we 'charge thoſe with undoing and hardening their Children or Servants, who have treated them with ſuch 'Indulgence or Severity, as they have abuſed to the 'hardening of themſelves. And indeed when *Men* 'are ſaid to *harden themſelves*, as *Pharoah* is often 'ſaid *to harden his own Heart*, and yet *GOD* is ſaid to '*harden them*; the beſt Account that can be given of 'it is this, that Men take Occaſion from what GOD 'does; take Occaſion, where no juſt Occaſion was 'given, to harden themſelves. And thus *GOD hardened Pharaoh*, or thus *Pharaoh* took Occaſion to '*harden himſelf*, from thoſe Exerciſes of Severity, 'and more eſpecially of *Goodneſs*, which ought to 'have ſoftned him, and which had a natural Tendency ſo to do. And GOD foreſeeing that this would 'be the Effect of it, ſays, *I will harden Pharaoh's* '*Heart*: Not, I will infuſe Hardneſs into him, but 'I will do ſuch Things, as I certainly know his hard and 'wicked Heart will improve into new Occaſions, and 'new Degrees of Hardneſs. For it is no Reaſon either 'for GOD or Men to forbear doing what Wiſdom

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'and Juſtice and Goodneſs direct to be done, becauſe 'hardened Sinners will harden themſelves the more by 'it.' The Sum is, that GOD ſaith *he would harden Pharaoh's Heart*, becauſe he intended to exerciſe him with ſuch Diſpenſations of Providence, as tho' they had no Tendency that Way, but the contrary, in themſelves; yet he knew *Pharaoh* would abuſe to ſuch a Purpoſe. And that this was the Truth of the Caſe appears from the whole Courſe of the Hiſtory.

Thus when *Moſes* and *Aaron* firſt *ſhewed a Miracle* to convince *Pharaoh* of the Power and Godhead of *Jehovah*, Exod. 7. 10. and of their Commiſſion from *Him* to bring his People out of *Egypt*; it pleaſed GOD at the ſame Time to permit *the Magicians of Egypt to do the like with their Enchantments*, Ver. 11. Upon which we are told, that *Pharaoh's Heart waxed hard*, Ver. 13. or *hardened itſelf*, for ſo the Paſſage ought to be rendered †. And yet it is to be obſerved, that *Pharaoh* had nevertheleſs ſufficient Matter of Conviction offered him, that JEHOVAH the GOD of *Iſrael* was ſuperior to the Gods of *Egypt*, and rather to be obey'd than they. For *He* evidently gave *his* Servants the Victory over *theirs*; inſomuch as *Aaron's Rod ſwallowed up the Rods of the Magicians*, Ver. 12. And ſince *Pharaoh* took not the Notice he ought to have done of this, it is not to be wondered at, that GOD ſuffered the *Magicians* to imitate his Servants in the next Miracle they wro't, without putting any ſuch Diſtinction between them, and ſo *Pharaoh was hardened again, neither did he ſet his Heart to this alſo*, Ver. 23.

At length *the Plague of Frogs* proves ſo grievous, that tho' the *Magicians* imitated this alſo; yet not being able to remove it, *Pharaoh*'s Obſtinacy is ſha-

† Vid. *Cal. Trem. Jun. Mont.* & *Grot.* in locum.

ken,

ken, he begs *Deliverance for himself and People*, and promises to *let Israel go*. Exod. 8.8. And no Doubt but he would have made his Promise good, if the Removal of the Plague had been suspended, 'till the Fulfilment of it. But when at the Prayer of *Moses*, *the LORD destroyed the Frogs*, that *Pharaoh might know, that there was none like to Jehovah the GOD of Israel*; Ver. 10. instead of acknowledging and being suitably affected with this, *Pharaoh seeing that there was Respit, hardened his Heart again*, Ver. 15. And thus, like them of whom the Apostle speaks, Rom. 2. 4, 5. *He despised the Riches of the Divine Goodness and Forbearance, and Longsuffering, not knowing that the Goodness of GOD led him to Repentance. But after his Hardness and impenitent Heart, treasured up unto himself Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of GOD.*

However, that *Pharaoh* might be left still more inexcusable, GOD from this Time tho't fit to restrain the *Magicians* from imitating or counterfeiting the Miracles of *Moses* and *Aaron* any more.

The first Time *Pharaoh* observed this, it is highly probable he flew into a Rage at the *Magicians*, and his Passion at them prevented his regarding *the Finger of GOD*; and so his *Heart* was still *hardened*, though stronger Conviction was now offered him, than had ever been before.

Under the *Plague of Flies Pharaoh* relents again, and promises *to let the People go*, provided *they went not far away*. But upon the compleat Removal of this Judgment at the *Prayer* of *Moses*, he emboldens himself in Sin, *hardens his Heart at this Time also, neither would he let the People go.*

During the rest of the *Plagues* it was manifestly for the most part, either *Moses*'s rising higher in his Demands than *Pharaoh* was before aware of; viz. that they

they ſhould be permitted to take *their little Ones, and their Flocks and Herds with them*, which provoked *Pharaoh* to *refuſe to let the People go* : or elſe the Divine Goodneſs in removing the Judgments upon his Humiliation and fair Promiſes, was repeatedly abuſed by him, to the *hardening of his own Heart.*

And after that *Pharaoh* and his People had been ſo thoro'ly frighted by the Death of their *Firſt-born*, as to ſend away *Moſes* and the Children of *Iſrael* ; yet their Hearts were enraged, and again *hardened* to purſue them, when they underſtood that the *Iſraelites* were not gone meerly *a three Days Journey*, but were *fled* to return no more ; and *that they were entangled in the Land, that the Wilderneſs had ſhut them in.*

Thus you ſee from Step to Step how *Pharaoh* took Occaſion to *harden his own Heart* ; when there was no juſt Occaſion given ; but for the moſt part much the contrary. And becauſe GOD had determined, for wiſe and weighty Reaſons, to exerciſe him with a Series of ſuch Providences, as he knew his wicked Heart would abuſe to the Increaſe of it's own *Hardneſs* ; therefore the *hardening of him* is ſeveral Times aſcrib'd to *GOD* ; tho' in ſome of theſe very Inſtances he is firſt ſaid to have *hardened himſelf.*

'Upon the whole (as One obſerves) GOD had 'peremptorily determined, not only to deliver *Iſrael*, 'but to puniſh *Egypt* ; both King and People, for 'their cruel Oppreſſion of *Iſrael.* And therefore he 'might, without any more Solemnity, have deſtroy-'ed *Pharaoh* and his People, and have carried *Iſrael* 'out of *Egypt* with a mighty Hand. But when *they* 'had deſerved to be puniſhed and deſtroyed, & *GOD* 'had reſolved to puniſh them, the Manner of the 'Puniſhment was at the free Diſpoſal of the Divine 'Wiſdom. And therefore *He choſe to puniſh them in 'ſuch a Way, as might beſt make the Glory and Power*

of

'*of the* GOD *of Iſrael known to the World.* And 'this is the Account which GOD himſelf gives why 'he took ſuch a Courſe with *Pharaoh*, as he foreſaw 'would harden and confirm him in his Reſolution of 'not parting with *Iſrael*, when he could have forced 'him, at the Expence of fewer Miracles, to have ſent 'them away, if he had ſo pleaſed.' *I will harden Pharaoh's Heart*, ſays he, Exod. 7. 3, 4, 5. *and multiply my Signs and Wonders in the Land of Egypt. But Pharaoh ſhall not hearken to you, that I may lay my Hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine Armies, & my People the Children of Iſrael, out of the Land of Egypt, by great Judgments. And the Egyptians ſhall know that I am the* LORD, *when I ſtretch forth mine Hand upon Egypt, and bring out the Children of Iſrael from among them.* And the ſame Thing he tells *Pharaoh* Exod. 9. 14, 15, 16. *I will at this Time ſend all my Plagues upon thine Heart, and upon thy Servants, and upon thy People; that thou mayeſt know that there is none like Me in all the Earth. For now I will ſtretch out my Hand, that I may ſmite thee and thy People with Peſtilence: and thou ſhalt be cut off from the Earth. And in very Deed for this Cauſe have I raiſed thee up*, or MADE THEE STAND (as it is in the Margin of your Bibles; that is, have all this Time preſerved thee, and not cut thee off by the former Plagues) *for to ſhew in thee my Power, and that my Name may be declared throughout all the Earth.* And this Reaſon GOD gives why *He hardened Pharaoh's Heart* to purſue *Iſrael*, Exod. 14. 4. *I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his Hoſt; that the Egyptians may know that I am the* LORD.

I have conſidered this Caſe of *Pharaoh* the more particularly, becauſe it is the moſt ſignal Inſtance of this Sort to be met with on ſacred Record. I ſhall now only add (in the Words of a celebrated Writer) that 'He, who was a cruel and bloody Prince, and

'deeply ingaged in Idolatry and Magick, had deſerved 'ſuch Judgments for his other Sins. So that he may be 'well conſidered as actually under his final Condem-'nation, only under a Reprieve; not ſwallowed up in 'the firſt Plagues, but preſerved in them, and raiſed 'up out of them, to be a laſting Monument of the 'Power and Juſtice of GOD againſt ſuch obſtinate 'Impenitency.

But, GOD's exerciſing notorious Sinners with a Series of ſuch Providences, as he foreſees they will abuſe to the encreaſing of their own Hardneſs, is not the only Account upon which he may be ſaid to harden the Hearts of Men. For the Scriptures teach us,

3. *That GOD ſometimes gives Men up to their own Hearts Luſts; and upon this Account he may be ſaid to blind and harden them.* Indeed, we may very well conclude, that GOD never does this, 'till he hath been greatly provoked by Men's abuſing the outward Means he makes Uſe of to enlighten their Minds, and ſoften their Hearts; and by their obſtinate Reſiſtance to the Strivings of his Holy Spirit in them. But if Men love Darkneſs, rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds are Evil; if they hate the Light, and ſhut their Eyes againſt it, GOD ſometimes thinks fit to withdraw it from them; and ſo the Things of their Peace are hid from their Eyes.

If they hate Inſtruction, and their Hearts deſpiſe Reproof; if they diſobey the Voice of their Teachers, and incline not their Ear to them that inſtruct them; GOD removes their Teachers into Corners, and their Eyes ſhall ſee them no more. Or elſe he ſuffers falſe Teachers to come among them, who privily bring in damnable Hereſies; and thro' Covetouſneſs, do with feigned Words make Merchandiſe of their Hearers.

Again,

Again, If Men deſpiſe the Riches of GOD's Goodneſs, which hath a natural Suitableneſs to lead them to Repentance; and inſtead of being overcome by it, ſtill go on treaſuring up Wrath unto themſelves; GOD ſometimes continues loading them with his Benefits: And ſo the Eaſe of the Simple ſlays them, the Proſperity of Fools deſtroys them. And on the other Hand, when the People turneth not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the LORD of Hoſts: When he hath ſtricken them but they have not grieved; hath conſumed them, but they have refuſed to receive Correction; have made their Faces harder than a Rock, and refuſed to return: He ſays ſometimes concerning them, Why ſhould they be ſtricken any more? And ſo he lets them alone to go on undiſturbed in their Treſpaſſes.

In fine, when Men rebel againſt GOD, and vex his Holy Spirit; when their Hearts are fully ſet in them to do Evil, and they always reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt, no Wonder if GOD at length reſolve, that his Spirit ſhall not always ſtrive with them, and if he proceed entirely and forever to take his Holy Spirit from them. And wo be unto them, if the Spirit of GOD depart from them, and the external Reſtraints of his gracious Providence are removed. In ſuch a Caſe the *Heart of Man, which is deceitful above all Things, and deſperately wicked, will be hardened more and more, thro' the Deceitfulneſs of Sin.* And upon this Account GOD may be ſaid ſometimes to *harden the Hearts* of Men, and *blind their Eyes*, becauſe that for their notorious Abuſe of them, he takes away all thoſe Things, which were any Check upon their unruly Luſts, and fooliſh Counſels.

So it was with the Iſraelitiſh Nation, of whom GOD complains, Pſal. 81. 11, 12. *My People would not hearken to my Voice; and Iſrael would none of me.*

So I gave them up to their own Hearts Luſts: and they walked in their own Counſels. And ſo Iſa. 6. 9, 10, 11. *The Voice of the* LORD *ſaid* unto the Prophet, *Go, and tell this People, Hear ye indeed, but underſtand not; and ſee ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the Heart of this People fat, and make their Ears heavy, and ſhut their Eyes: leaſt they ſee with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and underſtand with their Heart, and convert, and be healed.* The Meaning of this we may learn, from our bleſſed LORD's Application of it to the *Jews* of his own Time, Matt. 13. 14, 15. *In them*, ſaith he, *is fulfilled the Propheſy of Eſaias, which ſaith, by hearing ye ſhall hear, and ſhall not underſtand: and ſeeing ye ſhall ſee, and ſhall not perceive. For this People's Heart is waxed groſs, and their Ears are dull of hearing, and their Eyes* THEY HAVE CLOSED, &c. that is, they had firſt cloſed their own Eyes, and ſtopt their Ears, and given themſelves up, either to obſtinate Reſiſtance, or elſe to Liſtleſneſs and Indolence of Heart. And as a righteous Puniſhment for this, our LORD ſpoke to them only in *Parables*, that they might be left under that Blindneſs, & Darkneſs, & Stupidity, which they had wilfully bro't upon themſelves. And yet this ſame Thing is called *GOD's blinding their Eyes, and hardening their Hearts*, Joh. 12. 40. Which is enough to teach us not to expound ſuch ſtrong Expreſſions of GOD's blinding and hardening Men, according to the moſt rigorous literal Senſe of them.

Once more, we are told Acts 14. 16. that *GOD, in Times paſt, ſuffered all Nations to walk in their own Ways.* But we are elſewhere aſſured that the Reaſon why he ſo abandoned them, was, becauſe they had firſt notoriouſly diſregarded and contradicted the Light of Nature. Acts 14. 17. *From his Works of Creation and Providence his eternal Power and Godhead were clearly*

clearly ſeen. And yet, 'the Nations changed the 'Glory of the incorruptible God, into an Image made 'like to corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-foot-'ed Beaſts, and creeping Things. And becauſe that 'when they knew GOD, they glorified him not as 'GOD, neither were thankful; therefore GOD gave 'them up to Uncleanneſs, through the Luſts of their 'own Hearts. They changed the Truth of GOD in-'to a Lie, and worſhipped and ſerved the Creature 'more than the Creator, who is bleſſed forever. And 'for this Cauſe GOD gave them up to vile Affections. 'And even as they did not like to retain GOD in 'their Knowledge, GOD gave them up to a reprobate 'Mind, to do thoſe Things which are not conveni-'ent. *Rom.* 1. 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28.

Now in all theſe Caſes which I have mentioned, upon the Account whereof GOD is ſometimes ſaid in Scripture to *blind Men's Eyes and harden their Hearts*, there is not the leaſt Appearance of his creating or infuſing Blindneſs or Hardneſs into them. But he only withdraws thoſe Favours from them, which they made no Uſe, or an ill Uſe of; or elſe, to puniſh them for their wilful Condradiction in ſome Inſtances, to the Light of their own Conſciences, and the Strivings of his Holy Spirit; he leaves them entirely to the Wickedneſs and Folly of their own Hearts, in other Inſtances. And where is the Inconſiſtency of this, with the Holineſs of GOD's governing Providence? Or who can reaſonably complain, that *that* Light, and Grace, and ſpiritual Help are not given him; or are taken from him; which when he had, he never improved to any good Purpoſe, but often deſpitefully uſed, and moſt obſtinately contradicted? But I proceed to ſay

4. *That perhaps GOD may be ſaid to blind Men's Eyes, and harden their Hearts, partly becauſe he ſometimes*

times remarkably delivers them up, to the prevailing Power and Malice of the Devil. That *wicked One* is called *the Spirit that worketh in the Children of Diſobedience.* Eph. 2. 2. And we read of ſome, that are *ſnared, and taken Captive by him at his Will,* 2 Tim. 2. 26. And as he is the Adverſary of Mankind, who unweariedly ſeeks their Deſtruction; we may be ſure that he is ready enough to embrace every Opportunity which may be allowed him, to draw Men into Sin, and to harden them in it; that ſo their Iniquities may prove their Ruin.

And ſometimes GOD is pleaſed to ſuffer him exceedingly to harraſs and diſtreſs, even his own Children, with *manifold Temptations; that the Trial of their Faith being much more precious than of Gold that periſheth, tho' it be tried with Fire, might be found to Praiſe, & Honour, & Glory at the appearing of* CHRIST. 1 Pet. 1. 7. Thus *Job*, tho' a perfect & upright Man, beyond any at that Day upon the Earth; nevertheleſs had his Patience and Integrity moſt ſorely exerciſed, thro' the Malice and Subtlety of the Devil; by the Deſtruction of his Subſtance, and of his Children; by bodily Anguiſh, when ſmitten with Boyles from the Sole of his Foot unto his Crown; by the blaſphemous Sollicitations of his Wife; and by the uncharitable and bitter Cenſures of his Friends. And very probably Satan alſo aſſaulted his Mind more immediately with horrid Suggeſtions and Impreſſions; from whence it is that he complains of being *ſcared with Dreams and terrified thro' Viſions, ſo that his Soul choſe Strangling and Death, rather than Life,* Job 7. 14, 15. 'Tis true the pious Man, who knew nothing of the Permiſſion given to Satan to afflict and diſtreſs him; ſeems to aſcribe theſe Terrors by Night, as he had before aſcribed the Loſs of his Eſtate and Eaſe and the Death of his Children, to the immediate Hand of GOD.

GOD. But as he was certainly miſtaken *then*, ſo it is moſt likely that he was *now* alſo; and that his *inward* as well as *outward* Troubles, were not from the Hand of GOD, but of the Devil, by GOD's Permiſſion.

Nor was the only begotten Son of GOD himſelf exempted from a Trial, by the ſubtle Sollicitations of this Enemy of GOD and Man; but was once *led up of the Spirit into the Wilderneſs, to be tempted of the Devil*, Matth. 4. 1. And if Satan was thus permited to aſſault him, who was the Son of GOD by *eternal Generation*; no Wonder that he is not with-held from diſquieting them, who are the Children of God only by *Regeneration* and *Adoption*. But with reſpect to ſuch, *GOD who is faithful will not ſuffer them to be tempted above that they are able; but will with the Temptation, alſo make a Way to eſcape; that they may be able to bear it*, 1 Cor. 10. 13.

But as for thoſe, who are the Enemies of GOD and of all Righteouſneſs; who have ſo often rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit, that it is departed from them; GOD is ſometimes pleaſed ſo remarkably to deliver them up to the Power and Malice of the Devil, and in ſuch a Manner to permit him to infatuate and harden them in wicked and fooliſh Courſes to their own Deſtruction, that their Infatuation and Deſtruction are ſometimes in Scripture aſcribed unto GOD. This was the Caſe of *Ahab*, a Murderer and an irreclaimable Idolater, who had withſtood the Force of repeated divine Warnings, Propheſies and Miracles, and in Defiance of them all, had *ſold himſelf to work Wickedneſs in the Sight of the LORD*. 'At length 'GOD did reſolve to ſend him to *Ramoth Gilead* to 'fall there. And for this End ſuffered a lying Spirit 'to enter into the Mouths of his Prophets, and to har-'den him in that Expedition, againſt the prophetick 'Threatning of *Michaiah*. And therefore *Michaiah* ſays,

ſays, *Behold the* LORD *hath put a lying Spirit into the Mouth of all theſe thy Prophets, and the* LORD *hath ſpoken Evil concerning thee.* 1 King. 22. 23.

But this whole Narrative is manifeſtly figurative. For GOD does not take Counſel with his Angels (as he is repreſented here to do V. 19, 20.) and much leſs does he take Counſel with Devils; and leaſt of all does he prefer the Counſel of Devils before that of holy Angels. Now ſince the whole Repreſentation is figurative and parabolical, the Expreſſions ought not to be interpreted rigorouſly. 'And it is to be obſerved well, that though 'GOD permitted a lying Spirit to enter into *Ahab*'s 'Prophets, to perſuade him to go againſt *Ramoth Gi-* '*lead*; and tho' GOD might very juſtly have left him 'in the Hands of thoſe falſe Prophets, of his own mak- 'ing and chooſing; yet he ſends his own Prophet '*Micaiah*, whom all *Iſrael* knew to be the LORD's 'Prophet, to aſſure him, that if he went againſt *Ra-* '*moth Gilead*, he ſhould periſh there; and to inform 'him how it came to paſs, that his own Prophets were 'ſo confident of his Succeſs.' So that upon the whole, notwithſtanding the Strength and Boldneſs of ſome Expreſſions here uſed, it is plain that GOD did 'not 'deceive *Ahab*, but that he deceived himſelf, by pre- 'fering the Prophets of *Baal* before the LORD's Pro- 'phets, which was owing to his own idolatrous and 'wicked Heart.

Another Paſſage much like to this, is that of the Apoſtle, 2 Theſſ. 2. 9, 10, 11, 12. concerning the Appearance of 'the Man of Sin, whoſe coming is after 'the working of Satan, with all Power, & Signs, and 'lying Wonders, and with all Deceiveableneſs of Un- 'righteouſneſs in them that periſh: becauſe they re- 'ceived not the Love of the Truth, that they might be 'ſaved. And for this Cauſe GOD ſhall ſend them ſtrong 'Deluſion, that they ſhould believe a Lie: That they 'all

'all might be deceived, who believed not the Truth, but 'had Pleaſure in Unrighteouſneſs. Now (to borrow the Words of a noted Divine on this Place) 'what 'can be more juſt than this, for GOD to ſuffer the 'Devil to blind thoſe Men, who will not ſee? To 'impoſe upon *them with Signs, and lying Wonders, and 'all Deceivableneſs of Unrighteouſneſs, who do not love 'the Truth, but have Pleaſure in Unrighteouſneſs*; who 'endeavour to deceive themſelves, and deſire to be de-'ceived? For this is all that is meant, *by ſending them 'ſtrong Deluſions to believe a Lie*, that GOD ſuffers *the 'Man of Sin* to erect his Kingdom *after the working of 'Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and lying Wonders.* 'When Men are in Love with their Sins, & therefore 'do not love the Truth, becauſe it diſcovers & reproves 'their Sins, they deſerve to be out of the Protection of 'GOD's Grace, and to be delivered up to the Cheats 'and Impoſtures of crafty Men, or of wicked Spirits.

'This is the ordinary Rule and Method of GOD's 'Grace, that they who love the Truth ſhall find it. The Men that *cry after Knowledge, and lift up their Voice for Underſtanding; who ſeek her as Silver, and ſearch for her as for hid Treaſures; they ſhall underſtand the Fear of the LORD, and find the Knowledge of GOD*, Prov. 2. 2, 3, 4, 5. 'But if Men wilfully ſhut their Eyes 'againſt the Light, GOD often ſuffers the Devil to 'blind them; according to that 2 Cor. 4. 3, 4. *If our Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them which believe not, leſt the Light of the glorious Goſpel of* CHRIST, *who is the Image of GOD, ſhould ſhine into them.* 'Which 'ſhould make us all afraid of Prejudice, and an inor-'dinate Love of this World, which bar up the Mind 'againſt Truth, and by Degrees betray us to a judi-'cial Blindneſs.

I have now in an imperfect Manner conſidered the principal Paſſages of Scripture, which relate to, or

ſpeak of *GOD's hardening the Hearts, and blinding the Eyes of Men.* And from a diſtinct View of them, I hope I have made it appear, that they by no Means intend *That GOD creates or infuſes Blindneſs or Hardneſs into Men's Hearts.*--- But only either

1. *That when Men have firſt ſhut their Eyes againſt the Light, and hardened their Hearts againſt thoſe Methods of Divine Providence and Grace, which ought to have ſoftened them: GOD is ſometimes pleaſed for wiſe and weighty Reaſons to exerciſe them with a Series of ſuch Providences, as tho' they have no Tendency that Way; but perhaps much the contrary in themſelves; yet he knows their wicked Hearts will abuſe to the Increaſe of their own Blindneſs and Hardneſs.* Or

2. *That for their notorious Abuſe of them, GOD ſometimes thinks fit to withdraw from Men all thoſe Things which were any Check upon their unruly Luſts and fooliſh Counſels*; ſuch as the Strivings of his Spirit, the external Reſtraints of his Providence, and the like: *And ſo gives them up to their own Hearts Luſts.* Or

3. *That when Men have often rebelled and vexed the Holy Spirit of GOD, he is ſometimes pleaſed remarkably to deliver them up to the Power and Malice of the Devil; and permit him to infatuate and harden them in wicked and fooliſh Counſels to their own Deſtruction.* Or perhaps I might ſay

4. *That it is ſometimes upon Account of a ſad Concurrence of moſt, or all theſe Things, that GOD is ſaid to blind and harden Men.*

I would only obſerve further, that in all theſe judicial Diſpenſations GOD acts with ſovereign Liberty and Freedom, *hardening whom he will.* For tho' it be without Doubt a Truth, that GOD never *hardens* any, but ſuch as have highly deſerved to be made ſignal Examples of his juſt Severity; yet among the many who give him ſufficient Provocation to treat them in ſuch a Manner, it is certain that he *hath Mercy on ſome,* & *hardens others,* as

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it ſeemeth Good in his Sight.---And now what remains but that the Things you have heard be improved.

1. *To caution Sinners againſt charging GOD fooliſhly, and thinking to ſhift off the Blame of their wicked Courſes upon him.* Let no Man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. Every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Luſt, and enticed. And if God give you up to your own Hearts Luſts, it muſt be becauſe you have greatly rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit.

2. *You may all learn to beware of hardening your own Hearts under thoſe Divine Diſpenſations, which have a natural Suitableneſs to break & ſoften them.* If you do thus it will be no Wonder, if God be provoked to exerciſe you with ſuch Providences, as he knows your wicked Hearts will improve unto new Occaſions & Degrees of Hardneſs, until at length you become ſtupified paſt Feeling, and periſh in your Sins.

3. *Let ſuch of you as have not been moved by theſe Methods of Divine Grace, with which ſo many others have lately been ſoftned & melted; take heed leſt you be finally hardened thro' the Deceitfulneſs of Sin.* It is a ſure Token that you are hardened already to a great Degree, if you have ſtood unmoved, when you have ſeen the Souls of ſo many round about you melted within them becauſe of Trouble for their Sins. And the harder any Man's Heart is already, the more Danger he is in, of having it hardened more and more, even unto final Impenitence and Obſtinacy.

4. *But ſuch of you as have been greatly humbled before* God *for your Sins, beware that you don't relapſe again into them.* Nothing can be more diſpleaſing unto God, than for you, who have felt the Power of his Word and Spirit ſo much, to return again to Folly. And in ſuch a Caſe you will have great Reaſon to fear, leſt he be provoked to give you up to your own Hearts Luſts, and to the Power and Malice of the Devil.

F I N I S.

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